

**Hegel Bulletin Special Issue:**

**Racism and Colonialism in Hegel's Philosophy**

**Guest editors: Daniel James & Franz Knappik**

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

The Hegel Bulletin will publish a special issue devoted to the topic of 'Racism and Colonialism in Hegel's Philosophy'. We welcome contributions that explore racist and pro-colonialist elements in Hegel's philosophy, their historical and systematic context, and the role of these topics in Hegel's legacy.

Themes relevant to this special issue are the role of race, ethnicity, colonialism, colonial slavery, eurocentrism, white ignorance and universalism in Hegel's thought, and the historical context of such aspects in Hegel's thought; Hegel's impact both on racist/pro-colonialist and anti-racist/anti-colonialist thought; and the place of these topics in academic teaching on Hegel.

(Regarding the topic of race in the specific context of gender, family and kinship, the Hegel Bulletin is going to publish a further special issue, guest edited by Susanne Lettow, with a separate call for papers.)

Authors are strongly encouraged to carefully read the below information on the submission process and the detailed description of the issue's rationale and suggested topics, and to contact the guest editors in advance of submission if they are unsure of whether their papers are appropriate for the special issue.

Confirmed contributors:

Elvira Basevich  
Michael Hardimon  
Kimberly Ann Harris  
Karen Ng  
Alison Stone

The special issue is planned as double issue.

All papers (8.000-10.000 words, notes and bibliography included) will be double-blind refereed.

The editors of the special issue are Daniel James ([daniel.james@uni-duesseldorf.de](mailto:daniel.james@uni-duesseldorf.de)) and Franz Knappik ([franz.knappik@uib.no](mailto:franz.knappik@uib.no)).

The submission process consists of several stages:

1. Submission of extended abstracts for planned papers (ca. 1000 words) by October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021 (email to [franz.knappik@uib.no](mailto:franz.knappik@uib.no) and [daniel.james@uni-duesseldorf.de](mailto:daniel.james@uni-duesseldorf.de) with “Abstract Special Issue Hegel Bulletin” as header).
2. Notification of selected authors who are encouraged to proceed on their abstracts by end of November, 2021.
3. Submission of draft papers by February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022 (email to [franz.knappik@uib.no](mailto:franz.knappik@uib.no) and [daniel.james@uni-duesseldorf.de](mailto:daniel.james@uni-duesseldorf.de) with “Draft Paper Special Issue Hegel Bulletin” as header)
4. Pre-read online workshop with discussion of draft papers in April 2022 (exact date to be announced in due course).
5. Submission of complete papers for double-blind review at the Hegel Bulletin by June 30<sup>st</sup>, 2022 (<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/hegel>, choose ‘special issue’).

Abstracts, draft papers and complete papers can be submitted in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and German. Accepted papers in languages other than English will be translated to English for publication.

### **Rationale for the Special Issue**

The enormous upheaval of philosophical interest in Hegel’s thought over the last 30 years has impressively demonstrated that there is much that, in Benedetto Croce’s terms, keeps being ‘living’ in Hegel’s philosophy, as opposed to the ‘dead’ parts in his thought—the parts that we know to be mistaken and that are no longer of contemporary interest, such as his speculations about the number of planets, or his attempt to deduce the five senses.

It seems that many would include in the category of the ‘dead’ in Hegel’s thought also his view that there are different “races” (*Rassen*) (Enc. §393), some of which are unable to develop themselves a proper grasp of freedom (e.g. GW 25.1, 114; GW 25.2, 611f.); his claim that different “national” or “local spirits” (*Volksgeister, Lokalgeister*) each correspond to a different “ability of peoples’ intelligent and ethical character” (Enc. §394); his assertion that the inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa are an “infant nation” (GW 25.1, 35) living in savagery, barbarism and cruelty; his insinuation that colonialism is a necessary consequence of the problem of pauperism in industrialized countries (PhR §§246-248); or his interpretation of slavery in the European colonies as an institution that promotes the “discipline” needed to gain full freedom (GW 25.1, 115).

Compared to the amount of attention that topics like Hegel’s notions of recognition, or of second nature, or of idealism have attracted in the last years, his racism and pro-colonialism have certainly not been so far among the ‘hot topics’ of Hegel scholarship. When it is acknowledged at all that Hegel has made such outrageous claims, they tend to be put aside as views in which Hegel just followed the prejudice of his time, and/or as views that are marginal for his philosophy (e.g. Walsh 1971; Moellendorf 1992; McCarney 2000, 151; Nisbett 2008, 118; Pinkard 2012, 66)—at any rate, as passages in his oeuvre which can be safely ignored, just as his views on the number of

planets. In some subcultures of Hegel-scholarship—e.g. in research on Hegel in the German-speaking countries—there has been extremely little dedicated engagement with racist and pro-colonialist elements in Hegel’s thought (Neugebauer 1990, Kimmerle 1993 and Purtschert 2010 being notable exceptions). In other parts of the Hegel-world—e.g. in British, North- and South-American, and African scholarship—several authors have made important contributions on such topics (e.g. Serequeberhan 1989; Moellendorf 1992; Eze 1998; Bernasconi 1998, 2000, 2007, 2016; Buck-Morss 2000; Parekh 2009; Tibebu 2011; Narváez León 2019; Stone 2017, 2020; Zambrana 2021), but these contributions have so far gained not very much traction on Hegel scholarship more broadly, beyond strands of research linked to postcolonial studies and the historiography of Africa. But isn’t this relative neglect just reasonable, given that the relevant views of Hegel’s belong squarely into the dustbin of the history of philosophy?

This special issue aims to promote another way of conceptualizing and dealing with racist and pro-colonialist notions in the Hegelian corpus, inspired by authors like Robert Bernasconi and Alison Stone. Rather than simply presupposing that these elements can be safely ignored because Hegel plays no active role here and/or because they are marginal to his philosophy, we submit that the nature and systematic role of such elements in Hegel’s thought, as well as their historical context, should be studied very carefully. For first, there is evidence suggesting that Hegel’s role in the development of racist and pro-colonial thought was not a merely passive one (Bernasconi 1998, 2016). Second, there is robust textual evidence suggesting close systematic relations between racist and pro-colonialist elements on the one hand, and, on the other hand, many of the ‘living’ parts of Hegel’s thought that contemporary engagement with Hegel focuses on. For example, Hegel keeps returning on the topic of slavery in his Berlin lectures on the Philosophy of Right and on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit, connecting his highly ambiguous evaluation of colonial slavery (PhR §57 Rem.) to topics like consciousness of freedom, ethical life, his theory of legal personhood and property, and the master-slave dialectic: among other things, he suggests that slavery is appropriate to man as ‘natural being’, and has a liberating function for those who, because of their race (e.g. Africans), cannot on their own develop a proper understanding of freedom, or be really free agents (e.g. GW 25.1, 114f.). Furthermore, towards the end of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel links the topic of colonialism to his theories of international law and of world history (PhR §351). And Alison Stone (2020) has shown that basic elements in Hegel’s conception of freedom path the way for pro-colonialist attitudes.

We therefore contend that it is ill-advised to consider racist and pro-colonialist elements in Hegel’s thought as ‘dead’ parts of his philosophy that can be safely ignored. Ignorance and deliberate neglect have been argued to be key factors in maintaining systemic racism in general (e.g. Sullivan & Tuana 2007), and if Hegel’s racism and pro-colonialism really are closely systematically connected to the ‘living’ parts in his philosophy, there is a genuine risk that they secretly affect contemporary appropriations of Hegel which are not sufficiently attentive to such connections. Rather than being ‘dead’, we submit that the racist and pro-colonialist elements in

Hegel's thought are *'undead'*. Like racism and (neo)colonialism in general, they keep haunting us, and the more so, the more we are trying to ignore them.

This special issue is meant to improve on this situation by providing a platform that is specifically dedicated to the discussion of racism and pro-colonialism in Hegel's philosophy. In order to avoid reproducing the colonializing mechanisms that are arguably still at work in academia, the special issue aims at bringing together authors from very different backgrounds—including non-Western countries and the global South, and authors informed by different traditions, such as analytic philosophy, Critical Theory and postcolonial theory.

Many relevant passages that earlier research built upon stem from lecture texts and 'addition' sections that were compiled by Hegel's editors. The student transcripts of Hegel's lectures on Philosophy of History, Philosophy of Subjective Spirit, Philosophy of Right and others, which have been published over the last years, provide a philologically safer basis for scholarly discussion. Where possible, we invite contributors to use, in addition to the writings published by Hegel himself, these lecture transcripts instead of editors' compilations and 'addition' sections.

The following is a **list of potential topics and research questions** that submissions are invited to address. One and the same submission may cover more than one of these topics, and it is also possible to address further related topics.

### **1. Hegel on race and ethnicity**

Hegel introduces a hierarchic theory of 'races' and more specific ethnicities or 'national/local spirits' in his Philosophy of Subjective Spirit, and builds on this theory in his Philosophy of History. What are the philosophical details of Hegel's theory? How does Hegel understand the relation between biological, psychological, cultural and geographic factors that enter his conception of race and national spirits? What is the metaphysical status of race and national spirits for Hegel—are they a matter of nature or nurture? How does his account of race and national spirits relate to his views on the metaphysics of biological taxa and objective 'concepts'? How do differences among races and national spirits relate to different levels in the understanding of freedom and of sociopolitical development (ranging from the 'state of nature' to modern ethical life), and to what extent do these differences have normative impact? (E.g. as imposing different constraints on how people may legitimately be acted upon.) How integral are Hegel's claims on these issues to his overall system?

### **2. Hegel on colonialism**

European colonialism is addressed—rather favourably—both in Hegel's Philosophy of Right and Philosophy of History. Why does Hegel not raise concerns about the legitimacy of colonialism, e.g. because of property rights of indigenous people? How are Hegel's views on the legitimacy of colonialism based on his understanding of international law and world history? How can an oppressive regime like colonialism promote, in Hegel's eyes, the history of freedom?

### **3. Hegel on colonial slavery**

There are many comments on slavery in general, and slavery in the European colonies in particular, in the Hegelian corpus. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel presents the debate between abolitionists and anti-abolitionists as an “antinomy” (PhR §57), implying that both parties are to some extent right. How does Hegel’s ambivalent assessment of slavery work in detail? How are Hegel’s views on slavery embedded in the systematical contexts in which he addresses the topic—consciousness of freedom, state of nature vs. ethical life, struggle for recognition, property and personhood? How tight is the connection between Hegel’s views on race and colonialism, on the one hand, and his more generic views on slavery as a factor in the emergence of freedom (cf. Pinkard 2012, Alznauer 2015)? How does Hegel assess the Haitian revolution, and what is the philosophical relevance of this assessment?

### **4. Hegel’s eurocentrism**

Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*, according to which African, Australian and American indigenous people are “excluded” from history, and history necessarily progresses to the full realization of freedom and reason in modern Europe, has often been accused of eurocentrism (e.g. Dussel 1995; Tibebe 2011; Stone 2017; for critique, cf. Buchwalter 2009). How deeply rooted is this eurocentrism in Hegel’s philosophy? To what extent does it affect also other parts of his thought, such as his conception of philosophy or his views on colonialism? Do Hegel’s discussions of Asian cultures bear marks of eurocentrism, too?

### **5. Hegel’s universalism?**

Hegel’s philosophy is often thought to be committed to universal rights and an absolute value that all human beings have, independently of their origin, ‘race’ or gender, just in virtue of the rational abilities that they possess qua human beings. While there is much textual evidence to support this view, it is unclear how this universalism relates to the racist, pro-colonialist and eurocentric elements in his thought. Is there a contradiction here in Hegel’s thought? Or does he hold a particular version of universalism that leaves room for some humans being ‘more equal’ than others? Does he not subscribe to universalism, after all? Or does he resolve the contradiction by considering non-Europeans ‘sub-humans’ (cf. Mills 2005)?

### **6. Historical questions**

Robert Bernasconi (1998, 2016), Allegra de Laurentiis (2014) and Tom McCaskie (2019) have carried out important research on the sources for Hegel’s discussions of non-European cultures and of issues of ‘race’, but further research and debate are needed. To what extent and how does Hegel respond to other theories of race in his time and to contemporary debates on colonialism and slavery? Does German Idealism as such have a problem with ethnical and cultural otherness, given the racist and pro-colonialist elements in Kant’s philosophy, Fichte’s notorious anti-semitism, and the explicit racism in Schelling’s late lectures on *reinrationale Philosophie*? When in Hegel’s career do his views on race and colonialism emerge? Do they develop over time? To

what extent do earlier texts, e.g. the discussions of the master-slave-dialectic in the Jena writings, bear on these issues, and how do they relate to the explicit discussions of race and colonialism in later texts?

### **7. The legacy of Hegel's racism and colonialism**

It is still widely under-researched to what extent the racist and pro-colonialist elements in Hegel's thought had an influence on Hegel's contemporaries and later generations of thinkers. To what extent have authors in the various strands of Hegelianism in the last 200 years shared or criticized Hegel's racism and pro-colonialism? To what extent are post-Hegelian forms of racism and pro-colonialism indebted to the systematic foundations that these views seem to have within Hegel's own philosophy? Should the idea of rational progress, which is still prominent in many currents of neo-Hegelian thought (cf. Allen 2016; Brandom 2019), be seen with caution, given the connections it bears to topics like racism and pro-colonialism in Hegel's philosophy? How did Hegel contribute to the construction of whiteness?

### **8. Hegel as source of antiracist/anticolonialist thought**

That Hegel's philosophy includes important racist and pro-colonialist elements has not kept thinkers such as W.E.B. DuBois, Frantz Fanon, C.L.R. James, Aimé Césaire and Stephen Biko to use Hegel as source of inspiration for their own antiracist and anticolonialist thought and activism. To what extent, and through which forms of engagement and critique, did such thinkers manage to use the 'master's tools' to 'dismantle the master's house'? What, if any, philosophical resources in Hegel can be used to "rescue Hegel from himself" (Stone 2020), without ignoring the systematic connections that the racist and pro-colonialist elements in Hegel's philosophy seem to bear to other parts of the system?

### **9. Hegel and 'white ignorance'**

That many strands of Hegel scholarship have neglected issues of race and colonialism in Hegel's thought can be seen as an instance of "white ignorance"—the huge blindspot regarding matters of racism and colonialism that, according to authors like Charles Mills (2007), supports the continued existence of systemic racist and neo-colonial structures. To what extent was Hegel himself a victim of white ignorance? To what extent has Hegel's own philosophy contributed to creating and shaping structures of white ignorance—e.g. through his conceptions of world history and the history of philosophy, and his influence on how the philosophical canon was defined and academic philosophy was institutionalized (cf. Park 2013)? To what extent are various Hegelianisms and strands of Hegel scholarship affected by structures of white ignorance? Besides the notion of 'white ignorance', what further theoretical resources from contemporary critical philosophy of race and postcolonial thought can discussions of Hegel's racism and colonialism draw on?

## **10. Teaching the ‘undead’ in Hegel**

Neglect of the racist and pro-colonialist aspects in Hegel has affected not only research, but also teaching on Hegel. Recent years have seen a growing awareness that the ways classical authors (especially from the Enlightenment period) are taught need to become more attentive to issues of race and gender. In Hegel’s case, this debate has not taken place yet, and it is one of the aims of this special issue to promote such debate. We therefore invite also contributions that reflect on how the ‘undead’ in Hegel’s thought can and should be dealt with in university teaching: How can teachers and students be encouraged to address Hegel’s racism and pro-colonialism? What resources and teaching strategies/methods can be used to engage with these topics in the classroom? In addition to attracting articles on these questions, we plan to create a collection of relevant teaching resources, e.g. as supplementary file to the special issue.

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